

CHAPTER 226

January 1, 2012

"For fuck's sake Justin, it's one in the- Wait what am I doing? He can't hear me."

Maya rolled her eyes as she glared down at the boy, who had unfortunately collapsed on the floor before he could make it up to his bedroom after staying out so late that night. He never was much one for staying up past Midnight, but I guess Chie was enough of an incentive to drag him away from his bed into the wee hours of the night. He didn't get home until maybe twoish or so, and that was after bringing Chie home and listening to her father bitch him out about bringing her back late. Yeah yeah, whoopdi freaking do. Doesn't that guy have anything better to do than try to find reasons to hate Justin? I mean if he had any reason to hate Justin it should be because-

You know what? Not the point. Point was, Justin was exhausted as fuck from being out all night, and despite the fact that it was now one in the afternoon, it seemed he had no plans to wake up anytime soon; even with Maya violently shaking him. She usually didn't bother him when he was sleeping, but it was getting to a point where it was actually almost concerning that he was still asleep. Of course, once he started trying to kick her off by flailing his legs back and forth, it became pretty clear that he was just fine. She sighed before throwing her hands up in the air with annoyance and disapproval, giving up on waking Justin from his slumber. She had plans today anyway; if she waited any longer than she already had, she'd probably miss the movie. Yosuke had invited her to the movies on Christmas, and while Yosuke was just trying to be cute, Maya actually wasn't aware he was trying to ask her to the movies at any point, so to her, that was a serious proposition. As a result, what had been a joke quickly turned into serious plans. Yosuke didn't mind by any means, as much as he hated those cheesy chick flicks. Maybe he could relate more now that he actually had a girlfriend. Spoilers, he wouldn't; but it was still a little more endurable, so I guess there was that.

Maya rushed off to the bathroom, leaving Justin to whatever it was he was busy doing in his sleep, closing the door behind her as she leaned forward into the sink mirror. She turned her head side to side, thoroughly examining every portion of her face with great intensity. She had to look presentable, so she wanted to make sure everything was alright. The more she looked in the mirror though, the more she loathed what she saw. Her face was too long, her eyes didn't look like a natural color, her hair had quite a few split ends now that she looked carefully. Her skin was pale, like a ghost, just no color to it. And that just made her freckles stand out like a polar bear at an elementary school. Figure wise, she had been getting a little thicker around the hips, and had she not been there done that, she would contemplate sticking her finger down her throat. She was wearing no makeup, nor could she

afford to buy any; she was about as plain as you could get. And she was wearing the same clothes she wore everyday because she couldn't afford anything else. Her clothes was dirty, raggy, and kind of big on her figure. She never got to wash her clothes due to a lack of a second pair of clothes, so in all fairness it had a bit of an odor to it. Oh yes, Maya despised the girl in the mirror.

She pulled at her eye lids a bit as if to get a better look at her face before deciding that this just wasn't going to cut it. She sighed and hung her head into the sink with disappointment. What man would want her the way she was? Sure Yosuke seemed to like her that cool Christmas night, and the same could be said on New Years, but that was in the dark. If he got a good look at her in broad daylight, maybe he'd reconsider his affections. She didn't want that, and that was perhaps why she had been so critical of her appearances that day. She felt ugly, especially when she compared herself to the likes of, say, Rise, who Yosuke still seemed to flirt with on a regular basis. And that certainly didn't help either. It was like Rise was everything Maya couldn't be, and she was aware of that. She should be enraged that Yosuke constantly played along with her little love games after all that he had said to make her heart flutter, but instead she was left with nothing more than shame. Why couldn't she be an idol like that?

She sighed, lifting her eyes from the bathroom sink again to stare at her reflection. This just wasn't going to cut it. There had to be SOMETHING she could do. She rubbed at her chin for a moment, contemplating how she could turn this around in the matter of an hour. She didn't exactly have time to go shopping for some new clothes for example, and she didn't know a thing or two about makeup... but wait! It suddenly occurred to Maya all at once that while she didn't know a thing about make-up, her friends did. Rise was the last person Maya would approach on this despite her being the expert, and Naoto was... uh... well Naoto, but Yukiko and Chie seemed like they knew a thing or two about it. Not necessarily because Chie wore much make-up herself (she had some skin colored lip gloss, but that was about it as far as her daily make-up regiment), but rather because Chie had already helped Maya out in that department. Well, technically she helped Justin, but she was the one getting the makeover, so she'd count it. She stared at her reflection deeply, moving some stray hairs out of her face again, trying to picture her with the same hair tone as Justin again. She hated it, she thought he natural hair color looked fine, but... What if Yosuke liked it? He didn't really comment on it when she showed up to the pageant... No, no. She had to be true to herself, right? I mean, she didn't want to lose Yosuke, but... God it was so hard.

...Maybe she should get a second opinion. Chie would know what to do. She HAD to know what to do.

“And we're back on air.”

Justin's shadow watched from a distance as she stood there, speaking to a team of pure black cameramen, their form that of dark shadow blood, fabrics of their being flowing into the air as if their bodies were nothing but clouds drifting in the wind. It was a curious sight, but once the shadow got used to their presence, he had stopped caring about them and continued to glare at the reporter standing there under a street light, jabbering on about the body she had discovered. Perhaps she had never heard of the Mafia, but if she had she would know that you never talk about the corpses you find, let alone brag about it on live television. There was no Mafia here of course, but if there was, I guess that would make Justin her made man. She had talked for too long on matters that didn't concern her any longer.

"She doesn't go off air long enough for me to do something..." He growled with pure annoyance to the voice in his head. If Justin's shadow was impatient, it was hard to describe with Maya's shadow was. She was practically tearing out her hair up there in his skull. Assuming of course a disembodied abstract concept could have hair.

"Well maybe we can use this to our advantage..." She mused to herself. There was the problem of everyone watching, which one would assume would defeat the purpose of even going through with this in the first place. Perhaps she saw more potential in a captive audience. The thing about revolutions after all was that every uprising needed a voice, and every good cause needed a martyr. Justin's shadow could be the voice, and Maya's shadow could be the martyr, but at the end that was irrelevant if not one person actually knew what had happened. At the same point, they didn't need HIM to know, but if Justin was able to get away with the crime in the first place, it was entirely possible their god had long since abandoned them. And if that was the case, there needed to be a new lord of the shadows. He could be king, and her his queen. Assuming of course they were going by British rules in that the king gets shit rights in comparison to her royal highness. **"Shock and awe wins wars... Perhaps they need a little reminder that those who do not stand with us will fall."**

"Oh no. Are you TRYING to get us killed? Was dying once not good enough for you?" The shadow objected very vocally. He would do a lot of things in the name of the cause, but he would not die for it. Especially when it could be avoided with a little patience. Maya's shadow on the other hand was far riskier. If she had her way, Justin would do exactly what he was told regardless of safety concerns. No pain no gain after all, and a man who always folded his hand gradually lost the game.

"Let me make this clear. You're going to do it. And if you don't I will." The shadow echoed in his ear with fury. Who was he to disobey HER orders? He was nothing! An insignificant speck of dust in the wind without her. He was nothing more than the vessel for the revolution; a shell for the true masterminds at work. He was goon, never he forget his place lest she strike him down like the sewer rat he was.

And to think he truly believed he had any say in how this went down. He squinted a bit with a combination of irritation and anger.

“What does that even MEAN?” He remarked with slight sarcasm. Last he checked Shadow Maya was a disembodied voice in his head telling him to do evil things. What exactly did she think she was going to do, huh? Yell at him a little? It would take a little more than an attitude to get him to do something that would get him to explode like a water balloon. **“What are YOU of all people going to do, huh? Bitch at me? Call me names? Hurt my feelings?”**

“...Look at your hand.” Shadow Maya ordered having just about lost her patience. She was considering just taking control by this point. If you wanted to get something done right you had to do it yourself it would seem. Justin’s shadow rolled his eyes before directing his attention down to his hand. His fingers were all tapping along his leg, though he certainly hadn’t noticed before. In fact, they had been doing it for a while now, which had originally lead him to believe that he had just been doing it subconsciously. In fact quite the opposite was true. **“Okay good. That’s me losing my patience. You don’t want me to get angrier.”**

“Goddammit.” Justin’s shadow muttered to himself as he regained control of his fingers again. Seemed there wasn’t much getting out of this now that Shadow Maya was slowly seeping into his nervous control systems. He didn’t even know how, but she was. It was quite frightening to be quite honest, but he didn’t have time to figure that out now. All he had to do was put a bullet in that bitch’s skull and go home. After that Maya’s shadow would back off, right? She’d have no reason to try and control Justin if he was her only means of accomplishing her desires. Well actually that was a pretty damn good reason for her to take over. He’d work it out, for now, he’d rather not Shadow Maya do something brash. He could look at this logistically. Justin wanted her gone so that she couldn’t spill his identity; Maya wanted to send a message. There must have been a way to do both. He nodded his head a bit with thought before sticking his hand in his pocket to pull out his magnum, slowly raising it, not at the reporter, but at the two cameramen pointing the black boxes at her. Twice he pulled the trigger in quick succession, and twice they exploded out into a shower of black blood like rain. The announcer was immediately alarmed, turning around with a rather annoyed glare as Justin’s shadow slowly approached her, a determined look on his face. The cameras hit the ground so they couldn’t see his face, but they were still filming so they could hear everything.

“It looks like the San Diego Butcher himself has graced our presence viewers.” The announcer remarked without missing a beat. She was going to paint him as a villain even in the face of death. Was it so worth dying just to get views? Justin’s shadow didn’t get it. But he didn’t need to. All he needed to know was how to pull a trigger. He slowly raised his gun at the announcer’s skull, aiming it precisely at her forehead. **“Are you here to silence any witnesses? The**

cameras are still filming you know; you won't get away with it." She remarked so smugly, golden eyes staring him down. Justin glared at her a bit, annoyed with her attitude.

"You're 'live' coverage is over. Time for some dead air." And with that he pulled the trigger. He didn't even wait for the announcer's follow up. And given the smug grin on her face as she hit the ground, she truly believed herself invincible. That was her down fall; those who never fold are just as likely to lose the game as those who cave in on every hand. Especially when they couldn't tell a bluff from the truth. Justin's shadow spat on her corpse as he walked by, disgusted with the woman who threw her life away for nothing, before kicking one of the screens with his foot, adjusting it so it was still aimed at his feet. **"My fellow shadows, do not fear. I have come to liberate you from the clutches of a tyrant. You have all lived under oppression for far too long, turning a blind eye to your shitty ass lives in an attempt at remaining ignorant to the evil around you. But the time for change is now. This will be a new era, one where the skies are blue and the grass is green. We can live the life we were always denied. We SHALL destroy the humans and reclaim our world for our own. You don't know me, and I don't know you. But when the time comes, you will know my name. And when that time comes, you are either with me or against me... You don't want to be against me."** And with that the shadow placed a bullet in each of the two cameras, stopping the recording right there and then.

"Not bad. It's a start I suppose." Maya's shadow remarked with slight disappointment. She wasn't exactly satisfied with Justin's improve speech, especially when it sounded more like a threat than a call to arms, but it would have to do for now. They had much work to do after all, and when they were done painting this town red, all would know their names and rally under a single banner.

"An army doesn't form in a day."

"But a riot does."